

***Photo-Synthesis: A Metacognitive Reflection on a Journey of Learning***

***Photography***

**An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)**

**by**

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***May 2017***

**Expected Date of Graduation**

***May 2017***

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**Abstract**

Photography is an art form that first caught my interest in high school, and this creative thesis is meant to explore that interest. Through reading in self-regulated learning and in photo theory combined with a process of creating images I have attempted to teach myself photography. Over the course of this project I created nearly 600 images, several of which are displayed in this thesis. These images were shaped by Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, and Lynda Barry's *What It Is*. This project is a documentation of the process by which I came to better understand photography as an art form.

## **Acknowledgements**

First, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Timothy Berg for his support and guidance both through my thesis and through my entire career at Ball State. Without his support in various projects over the past four years I do not think this thesis could ever have even been conceived of, and it certainly would not have gotten accomplished.

I would also like to thank my mom for her support through the times when I felt that I would never be able to finish this project.

Finally, I would like to give a monumental thanks to the subjects of my photographs because without them this project could never have happened. Thanks especially to Lily Larson, Meghan Miller, Zach Wakefield, Frankie Arnett the cat, the strangers I photographed at the Scramble light, and the various objects in my apartment and out in the world for being the willing subjects of my photo projects.

## **Process Analysis**

From the outset the planned end result of my thesis was a series of photographs showcasing the learning I had accomplished over the course of my project. The issue of this project arose from the point of this project: I set out to teach myself an art form, and I needed a way to showcase that learning. I chose to approach my end result as a confessional paper, detailing in the first person the steps I took through the process of teaching myself about photography. I broke the paper down into sections according to those steps, first giving a brief overview of the reading I did on self-regulated and intrinsically motivated learning, then of the reading I did in photo theory, and finally working through explanations of the photo creation projects I undertook for my thesis. As a creative endeavor, discussing and describing the processes of creating individual photos comprises the bulk of my thesis.

While mine is not entirely a research thesis, there was a strong need for research at the outset of this project. The reading I did on self-regulated learning and on photo theory provided the foundation necessary for the photo creation work of my thesis. I used this brief research to shape the creation of my plan for how to accomplish my end goal of having created a series of decent images that could serve as a way to showcase my accomplishments in teaching myself photography. The point of this research was not to draw conclusions about self-regulated learning or photo theory. This research was a stepping-stone to my ultimate goal of creation. It is included in the thesis as part of the creative process.



The bulk of my paper is focused on examining the processes I used to create photographs and on assessing the success or failure of the end results of those processes. These assessments describe the event of the creation of the images, the inspiration for the creation of the images, and anything that was learned in the process of creation. Images are integrated into the text to better illustrate each step of the process and to provide immediately visible concrete examples of the work being analyzed.

The almost-hybridity of my project has proven tricky. This is a creative thesis, but the creation is in a way research. I set out at the beginning to teach myself photography, so simply displaying finished photographs with no written explanations fails to get to the heart of my project. This could not simply be a process analysis statement and a creative presentation because without explanation a series of images would fail to achieve my goal; however, writing a paper full of research was never the intention. I chose to approach it as a narrative, weaving in the research I read and the photos I made to create one cohesive story that shows every step of the process. In many ways my entire thesis is a process analysis statement, and this process analysis serves as a meta explanation for why I made the decision to treat the bulk of my thesis as a place to outline and explicate the methods I used in generating a creative project.

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***Photography***

## **Introduction**

One day in the far distant past of my junior year of high school I took a course on photography. We learned about operating our cameras and the rule of thirds; color theory and different lighting positions. What we did not learn, however, was how to be photographers. We made pictures and displayed them, but the pictures were very much uninteresting beyond their display of technical understanding. We created without being particularly creative. The visual storytelling of photography appealed to me even though I left the class feeling unaccomplished in creativity.

When I came to Ball State I joined the telecommunications department in part because of my leftover interest in visual storytelling, but I quickly left because I found the technical courses the department was focused on of little interest. I joined the English department and learned about storytelling, but we only dealt in words. I still wanted to work in images.

My thesis is an opportunity to explore. Working on it gave me an opportunity to understand how learning works and to apply that to an area that has been of interest to me for years. This research/creative project is an exercise in learning something new for myself, strictly because it is something that it was important to me to learn. I started this project wanting to learn to be a photographer, and it took a multi-pronged approach to attempt to achieve this dream: research on self-regulated learning, reading in photo theory, and actual photo creation. The three separate strands came together to allow a new sort of growth to occur.

## **Self-Regulated Learning**

I embarked upon this journey of self-teaching with very little information on how the process of learning works, and even less information on how those ideas could be fit into a mode of education where the learner was also the teacher. College has trained me well, and so I began my search at Bracken Library. The issue I encountered here was that “self-teaching” as a search term turned up very little information. When I took that term to the databases, however, the topics section of one of the articles suggested the term “self-regulated learning.” This suggestion lead to significantly more fruitful searches.

The very first book I found on self-regulated learning in Bracken discussed the need for a shift from a learner-passive to a learner-active education, or one wherein “personal initiative, perseverance, and adaptive skill” are valued (Zimmerman 1). In my opinion, my project falls easily and directly under this education redefinition. My plan was to make myself active in my own education by taking on the task of educating myself in an area where my personal experience was limited. According to Barbara L. McCombs, “learning is a natural process directed primarily at creating the self” (82), and for me this further solidified the usefulness of my project. The self I aspire to be is interested in art and understanding the process of creativity. As someone with limited experience in the creation of art after having finished with elementary school art classes, self-regulated instruction in the field would allow me to become the photographer I aspire to be one day. Taking heart in the fact that the idea of self-regulated learning seemed as though it would



provide useful information that could helpfully shape my self-teaching process, I read on.

### *Self-Ideation*

A prevalent notion in self-regulated learning studies is that “learning is a natural process directed primarily at creating the self” (McCombs, 82). This theorizes that humans learn in order to become their personal ideal version of themselves, and that completing goals focused on individual growth are key factors of motivation in learning (McCombs, 100). In her article “Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Achievement: A Phenomenological View,” McCombs states that “reactions to self-evaluations that yield discrepancies between who we are and who we want to be are primary determinants of motivation” (95). This is further refined by Paris, Byrnes, and Paris who note “people construct personalized interpretations of their own lives and actions that reflect coherence and optimism” (Paris et al, 257). They theorize that desire to be perceived by others in a certain way can motivate action. These theories about the perceptions of the self by the self and by others shaped my thesis before I had ever learned that it was specifically laid out as a theory of self-regulated learning.

In August of my senior year of college, I was in a panic. Thesis proposals had technically been due by the end of the semester before, and I had yet to complete mine. The issue was that I had absolutely no idea what I wanted the subject of my thesis to be. While discussing my quandary with my friends, one of them suggested that I complete a creative project based on an idea I had shared with her freshman year, way back in the days when my major was telecommunications. I had wanted to



create a video that told a creepy story loosely based on a song that I loved at the time. The suggestion was not viable because I had no experience in camera operation or filmmaking, but it did give me the spark of inspiration that became this project. My interest in visual storytelling did not die with my defection from the telecommunications major; however, all work on learning how to use visual medium effectively in storytelling did. As an English major I focused on word-based storytelling, and yet I wanted to be able to work visually. A discrepancy between my current skillset and my ideal skillset gave me a direction to take my project. Instead of attempting to produce a film, I would teach myself photography. This would allow me to learn camera operation and visual storytelling in a more manageable and achievable way. Learning photography gave me a way to become a better visual storyteller and thus become closer to the ideal version of myself.

### *Individual Interest*

K. Ann Renninger explains that “individual interest has been variously discussed as a psychological state; a relatively enduring predisposition to engage a class of objects, events, or ideas” (375). Individual interest thus becomes an evolving relationship between a person and a subject whereby a person will become associated with that subject. My individual interest in photography developed early. I have always found myself trying to frame the world in different ways and seeing scenes of daily life as individual images. I imagine moments frozen and look for the ways to make them interesting. I first took a photography class in high school, and I found that it touched on my ways of framing the world. Taking the class gave me what Renninger calls the “stored-knowledge component” of learning, meaning that I

had enough of an understanding of the basics of photography to create my “curiosity questions” that would let me explore how to make interesting images (376). My overarching curiosity question became “What makes a compelling image?” and I shaped my project around answering this question to the best of my ability by reading and creating what I hoped would be compelling images.

According to Renninger there are four steps to individual interest, and these four steps are necessary for organizing information, deciding to learn more, and having personal questions about a specific area:

1. Know enough to organize
2. Seek resources to figure out what is not known
3. Enjoy understanding and developing competence
4. Be clear about what still needs to be understood.

These four steps helped guide me in the process of shaping this project. As I already said, a base-level photography class in high school had given me a working knowledge of some of photography’s most simple aspects like using the rule of thirds or creating interest with lighting. I spoke to my advisor about where to find information about photo theory and used the library to find information on self-regulated learning. I found myself satisfied when the theories made sense and when I caught a good image with my camera. While my mechanical skills with a camera were somewhat developed at the beginning of this project, I knew that I understood very little photo theory and that I needed to explore that area. Working my way through these four steps helped me further refine my project.

### *Goal Setting*

At the outset of this thesis project, my goals were extremely general. I had set my self to the two tasks of learning photography and learning how self-instructed teaching works. Through reading on self-regulated learning, I realized that these goals needed to be broken down further and to be set to a more definite standard of what would constitute having met the goals. McCombs discusses what makes a goal useful. The goal must take into account what is important to the goal setter, it should be able to guide a learning plan, it must allow the learner to assess goal achievement regularly, and crucially it must have realistic expectations of what can be accomplished (108-109). Dale Schunk adds three further conditions of effective goals: specificity, which allows for ease of gauging progress towards goal completion; proximity, meaning that goals that are more easily attainable create higher levels of motivation in a learner because the learner believes achievement of the goal to be attainable; and difficulty, meaning that goals set should be proximal to a learner's current level of understanding but not so close that there is no challenge to completing them (132). These parameters for a useful goal allowed me to narrow down my somewhat grandiose and directionless plans into something that would actually be conducive to my making headway on this project.

The problem with my goals as I originally articulated them was that both encompassed more work than could possibly be completed in the three months in which I had to complete this thesis. Self-regulated learning is an academic field full of different theories and approaches. To become an expert requires a Ph.D.

"Learning photography" is a lifelong process as it is an art form. One never wakes up



having completely discovered everything there is to know about creating any type of art, and I believe that photography is no exception. Thus I narrowed my goal down. Part one of the goal was to read *Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Achievement* and *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation*, two books from Bracken library that dealt specifically with the type of information I needed to guide my learning. My goal became more manageable, changing to learning some of the basics of self-regulated learning. Part two of the goal was to read some specific works on photography and image creation: Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, and Lynda Barry's *What It Is*. Part three of the goal was to set myself to specific photographic assignments and simply complete as many as possible each week. Many of these assignments came from *The Photographer's Playbook*, but others were inspired by other books I was reading for this research, the everyday life theory I was reading for another class, and general life experiences that I wanted to attempt to photograph. The final part of this goal was to have produced at least five images I felt that I could show off as examples of what I had created if anyone asked.

This new, better-articulated goal for myself was a better guide for this process than the original non-specific goals. I decided to start in self-regulation theory because (as evidenced by my lackluster original goal creation) I needed more information on how to teach myself something in the most effective way. With an end game goal in mind I had given myself something specific and concrete to be working towards. While part three of my goal may have been unspecific towards the amount of work to be completed each week, it gave me the freedom to do as much

work as I could without necessarily having micromanaged my quota. My goal gave me both specificity and freedom, and this allowed me to pursue it in such a way that I felt comfortable with my ability to complete the goal in the set space of time.

#### *Performance vs. Mastery*

A smaller piece of my goal setting regarded the idea of performance versus mastery goals. According to Kenneth Barron and Judith Harackiewicz mastery goals are designed with the idea of mastering a certain skill in mind whereas performance goals are set to demonstrate competence in a task when compared to others (231). Performance goals can promote adaptive learning, and individuals with high achievement motivation can find they are more motivated by performance goals than mastery goals. I would identify myself as an individual with high achievement motivation, and in a regular classroom scenario I do find myself more motivated to complete goals that allow me to showcase my competence relative to the performance of others.

The parameters of this project created a special case in which I felt that performance goals would more hinder than help me. As an individual with limited photography experience, attempting to demonstrate my competence relative to others would absolutely show that my skills were lacking. I felt that consistently coming up short would have sapped my motivation faster than working on goals based on improvement. I decided that my goals needed to be about becoming more competent at producing images than I was currently and not about producing work that could display my competence relative to others.



### *Self-Observation*

In his article in *Self-Regulated Learning and Academic Achievement*, Dale Schunk advocates that “self observation can motivate behavioral change” (131). It is necessary to assess learning behaviors in order to understand under what conditions learning behaviors operate most effectively. Schunk gives the example of a student who notices that they accomplish less when they study with a friend than they do when they study alone and who chooses with increasing frequency to study alone as an example of an instance in which self observation clearly causes a behavioral change (131). Self-observation must be performed at regular intervals in order to provide accurate information to the observer. Without regularity results of self-observation may be skewed. Consider, as a counter example to Schunk’s efficacious learner studying alone, a student who only reflects on the times in which group study provided meaningful and useful results. Even if those instances were infrequent this could lead a learner to the belief that group study sessions are more effective, ultimately hindering their learning.

Self-observation in my photographic endeavor proved an interesting challenge. I wanted to be certain I was recording all the outcomes of the various photography exercises I attempted, and I wanted to make sure that I was doing so faithfully. Having created the photographs themselves allowed for one type of self-observation. The literal image could be observed to see how well I had completed the assignment. This, however, was not a sufficient observation, for even the failed assignments could potentially have led to new and interesting creations or insights.

Obvious failure did not account for the learning that may have gone on behind the scenes.

Here, a further caveat of Schunk's ideas of self-observation gave me a direction in which to proceed. He mentions that "self-observation is aided with self-recording," and so I determined that I ought to keep some written record of experiences to document my work on my thesis project (131). Everyday I carry a black Mead five subject notebook in my bag, and I dedicated one of the sections to a journal of sorts to record notes on the theories I read to inform my thesis work, ideas for photographic assignments to give myself, and reflections on photographic assignments after I had completed them. (A scan of this journal is included in this work as Appendix A.) This gave me a running record of the work I accomplished, allowing me to visually see progress being made. It also let me record those photographic failures that were also successes in a way that made their value apparent. Whereas only having copies of photos that did not fit the parameters of an assignment would appear as failure, having a textual account of what I learned through attempting the assignment left a record of learning. Assessing how and why an assignment did not go to plan allowed me to reorient my approach to subsequent assignments and let me reflect on what might have been successful in an overall failed attempt.

#### *Schemas, Tactics, and Strategies*

A further benefit to my journal keeping was the way in which it allowed me to update the conditions of tasks as I approached them. Philip Winne explains that knowledge is produced through schema, or knowledge "about categories and

events" (158). Schema allows us to process information quickly because it groups together similar types of knowledge and lets the brain process it all in one chunk. In many ways producing learning is about giving the learner new schema through which to filter information. A particular type of schema, the tactic, is explained as "a condition-action rule" meaning that "IF a set of conditions is the case, THEN (and only then) is a particular set of actions carried out" (Winne 159). This simple form of schema was demonstrated in my work, for example: IF I completed a photographic assignment; and IF that assignment was a success, and I wanted to record how and why the process of creating the photo succeeded; or IF the assignment was a failure, and I wanted to record how and why it failed or what I learned from the failed process; THEN I would spend time writing in my journal and reflecting on the assignment. The creation of a condition-action rule in my journal keeping reflected the development of a new schema, a category of knowledge that pertains to self-regulated learning, and that category allowed me to easily make decisions regarding the actions I would take in my learning.

Condition-action rules are not sufficient for high-level goal attainment according to Winne. He goes on to separate out the strategy from the tactic, where a strategy "provides means for adapting work on a task based on feedback that becomes available," and he articulates this task adaptation as IF-THEN-ELSE (Winne 161). IF-THEN-ELSE takes the basic form of the tactic where specific conditions are cause for a certain action to be taken and adds a further step where the efficacy of the action taken is assessed. In instances where the action has failed to produce the desired results, the ELSE allows for the learner to reevaluate and change their



approach. For me, keeping a journal was the way in which I could evaluate my THENs. The journal recorded success and failures, and having the ability and space to reflect on why things worked or did not work let me change my future approach to assignments. One such example came about when I was working on portraits. I found that often the portraits looked awkward and wrong, but in noticing the awkwardness in the failed portraits I was able to find a way to mitigate that awkwardness and make better photos. I was able to come closer to my overall learning goal by evaluation of the effectiveness of a completed condition-action rule.

#### *Extrinsic Reward*

Motivated by a desire to effectively monitor my goal completion in the first and second parts of my goal, the parts that were heavily focused on completing the reading of a high volume of theory, I started using a Pomodoro timer. A Pomodoro timer works by setting rounds of work and breaks. Every twenty-five minutes of work is followed by five minutes of break, and a longer twenty-five minute break is given at the end of four of these cycles. I thought that using a Pomodoro timer would allow me to effectively monitor and regulate the amount of time I was working on reading my way through all the books of theory I needed to get through. I quickly found, however, that concentrating on reading became hard when I had the Pomodoro timer set.

Extrinsic motivation was causing me to lose interest in the reading. For me, the five-minute breaks of the Pomodoro timer had become a task-contingent reward. In her article "Rewards and Creativity" Beth Hennessey explains that task-contingent rewards decrease motivation to complete a task (57). The issue with

task-contingent rewards is that by putting focus on an extrinsic reward distracts the learner from completion of the task at hand. Hennessey uses an example wherein she compares a creative task to a maze: the maze has only one starting point but many possible exits and many, many ways to reach those exits. When a reward is offered for exiting the maze, the goal becomes to exit as quickly as possible, not to find the most interesting exits and paths out (65). Focusing on the breaks meant I was powering through the reading without ever stopping to consider the implications. It was preventing me from getting the fullest experience of the reading, and so I quickly abandoned my use of the Pomodoro timer and instead focused on simply reading as much as I could whenever I could for as long as I could.

My lack of motivation in the presence of reward also shaped my goal-setting process. For the third part of my goal I set myself to doing as many photography assignments as I could each week. While it may seem like this lacks the specificity outlined as being necessary to a good goal, I knew that setting a specific number of exercises for myself each week would cause me to focus on simply hitting a number and not on producing good work. I wanted to operate within the confines that I knew would let me be my best, and I personally would have had my motivation to do good work sapped by an externally imposed number of assignments to be completed each week. Giving myself open-endedness in this goal let me “play in the maze” so to speak and focus on creation.

#### *Challenge, Curiosity, Control, Context*

Mark Lepper and Jennifer Henderlong describe four types of intrinsic motivation “that have remained of interest since the 1950s...the 4 “C”s of intrinsic



motivation — challenge, curiosity, control, and context” (258). Intrinsic motivation can come from people deliberately seeking out ways to challenge themselves, as in the example given of young children learning to walk. It can also come from an individual’s desire to satisfy curiosity, where people have a personal sense of fulfillment when questions about the world are answered. Learning so that one might feel a sense of control over one’s environment is also intrinsically motivating. Being able to contextualize learning and to understand the broader ways in which it might be useful after the final assessment of skills gained also provides for intrinsic motivation.

The overarching goal of this project was to teach myself photography. For me this hit all four “C”s. I had sought out the challenge of teaching myself a new skill. Visual storytelling has always sparked my curiosity as evidenced by the fact that I began college as a telecommunications major. Using my thesis as a place to explore photography let me control a project that I had to complete to graduate and steer it in a direction that would give me the most pleasure to complete. As someone who is interested in one day telling stories for a living, learning a new medium of storytelling fits nicely into my somewhat indistinct future plans.

#### *Interpersonal Focus*

Carol Sasone and Jessi Smith note in their chapter “Interest and Self-Regulation: The Relation between Having To and Wanting To” that interest in a task may depend on factors not directly related to the task (342). This is a point already touched on in discussion of external rewards, wherein I described my lack of interest in completing the reading based on the presence of an external reward.

However, there was another factor not directly related to my task that increased my motivation to complete it. As Sasone and Smith learned from their studies, females are more likely to have an interpersonal focus in achievement goals (350). I very much found myself in this category. Discussing the work I was doing for my thesis with friends, family, and my advisor always pushed me to work harder on my goal. A friend of mine was taking a photography class while I was working on this thesis project, and when we would discuss what we were working on I felt motivated to create. Discussion of work let me rekindle my desire to work, and, while this may seem silly and insignificant, it helped me keep from getting burnt out on my task. Having to explain what I was learning made me reconsider what had interested me about the work in the first place, and that recharged my desire to do the work.

### **Photo Theory**

To embark on the process of creating photos, I began to read photo theory. With some previous experience in photography in high school I felt confident in my ability to mechanically operate a camera. My parents gave me a Nikon digital camera during high school, and it was the camera I had taken into my high school photography classes. The camera was not a DSLR; it had only one lens and the focal length could not be adjusted, but it did have other manual features like an adjustable ISO and shutter speed. While I did upgrade to a DSLR before beginning work on my thesis, I decided photo theory would be a more productive strain of research because I had a general idea of how to adjust the manual settings to change the outcome of my photographs.

I had purchased Lynda Barry's *What It Is* after seeing her speak at Ball State last semester, and I felt that her approach to imagery would be an interesting complement to practicing photography. I also solicited two recommendations for books of photo theory from my advisor, Tim Berg. He suggested that I find Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Susan Sontag's *On Photography*. While it is hard to quantify the effects these works had on the creative output of photographs that I produced for this thesis, I think it is important that I take the time to discuss them here. Their effect may not be immediately apparent in each individual photograph, but they helped me to shape the direction of the photographs as a whole. The reading in theory gave me new insights into the world of photography, and it was important to my exploration of the medium.

#### *What It Is*

Lynda Barry's book focuses specifically on writing images, but I found that much of her approach seemed applicable to creating photographs. She talks about how "images are found by/in/through action between inside and outside" (Barry 15). The idea is that an image can exist in the mind, but the trick is to get that image out into the world. Barry focuses on thinking about creation beyond the "two questions" of "is this good?" and "does this suck?" (123). Her experience of drawing and creating as a child made her feel "both there and not there;" sucked into the world of the story that lines she was making on the paper were creating (124). This active creation happened without thinking, according to Barry, and recapturing it as an adult meant embracing uncertainty. For her, the trick to creating was ignoring the "two questions" and focusing on simply doing. The way to create is to move



beyond fixating on quality and to simply make stuff. Eventually something interesting will happen.

Oddly for a project about photography this book that contained almost no ideas about photography specifically is the most clearly informative of my project. A major issue I had when approaching this project was fear. I was afraid that I would be unable to produce any good photos. I was afraid that my pictures would just all be terrible. This consuming concentration on being good enough made it hard for me to start shooting. Reading Barry's ideas about the unconscious approach to creation wherein you just have to let it happen however it will happen helped me overcome this fear. It gave me the encouragement I needed to just start shooting. I focused on maybe having an idea of what I was trying to shoot but letting whatever pictures happened happen. It meant I took a lot of really terrible photos, but it also meant that I took some that I think are interesting. Barry's ideas let me get beyond my fixation on good and instead work on making things, and making lots of things meant that some of the things turned out well.

#### *Camera Lucida*

Roland Barthes' book was a mind-blowing read. He imagines photography in dark and violent terms; it is "profound madness," a wound, death (13). He describes photographers as "agents of death" at one point, describing the way in which photographs can function almost as *memento mori* in their ability to showcase that which has died (Barthes 92). Viewing photographs of a loved one who has passed away, like Barthes' viewing of the Winter Garden photograph of his mother, becomes a reminder of the fact of their death and of the fact of your own. He

describes viewing a photograph of a young man who had been hanged in 1865 and feeling passionately that the man was going to die despite the fact that he had been dead for many years. This in photography catches Barthes' attention and makes a photograph interesting: "*that* is dead and *that* is going to die" (96).

Barthes' calls this element of a photograph that arrests the attention a "*punctum*" which he opposes to the "*studium*;" the more ordinary elements of the photograph like subject matter or composition (26). Not every photograph has *punctum*, and not every *punctum* is the same. In Barthes' view photography is in many ways subjective. In describing the Winter Garden photograph of his mother he describes that the way it pierces him is personal and visceral, and that it thus for him becomes unable to be recreated. The thing about that photograph that captures him exists only in that photograph, though it may not exist for others in that photograph. He also believes that a *punctum* cannot be artificially created; it is something that simply happens or does not happen in a photograph. The captivating quality is due in part to the fact that it was unintentional and is simply there in the image.

In this conjecture of photography as most interesting at its most unintentional, for me this became a notion of being in the right place at the right time and shooting. If an arresting photo is in many ways created without the intention of the photographer then much of becoming a "good photographer" becomes knowing at what moment to pull out your camera and shoot. In much the same way that Lynda Barry's idea of not knowing encouraged me to take as many photos as possible as often as possible this idea helped me to just start shooting.



Additionally, considering the subjectivity of the art form loosened me from the tight bonds of trying to make something "good." If each person can have a different reaction to a photo then there can be no way to know what is "good" in a vacuum, and Barry's two questions become not only unhelpful but entirely irrelevant. I shifted my focus. I decided that I was trying to create things that I like, and hoping that they strike other people in the same way became a secondary concern.

### *On Photography*

I was most interested in Susan Sontag's book. There was something striking about her theories for me; a literary *punctum* that I cannot describe. For Sontag photographs are instructive in creating "an ethics of seeing" (3). The images themselves teach the viewer how to perceive the world and how to interact with the world. The camera can estrange the everyday making "familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away" (Sontag 167). Photography is an art that allows the beauty in the seemingly mundane to be captured, thus giving value to that which is photographed; "to photograph is to confer importance" (28). Photography confers importance in part because it equalizes: "No moment is more important than any other moment; no person is more interesting than any other" (Sontag 28).

Sontag gets at the individuality of photography with the "heroism of vision...allowing each person to display a certain unique, avid sensibility" (89). Photography allows each photographer's unique way of viewing the world to be made public, and this uniqueness has let beauty be found in new ways.

Beauty becomes something that exists anywhere a photographer can see it; it becomes something to be found in every moment instead of something that exists in a specific set of ideals. Photography is “an assault on reality and a submission to reality” because it creates its own imagery of reality while still requiring the capture of something real to exist (Sontag 123).

Despite finding *On Photography* the most personally interesting of the photo theory I read, it is also the work I have the hardest time giving a concrete example of how it influenced my attempts at creating photographs. Perhaps this is because in some ways this reading justified my entire project. Sontag’s idea of the heroism of vision and an idea that time elevates all photographs to the level of art let me, a complete and self-taught amateur photographer, feel as though the images I have created have some value. I may never know if what I have created “counts” as art, but perhaps one day it will. Maybe the individuality of photography means that my creation was necessary to capture the beauty of certain moments no one else could capture. Maybe creating my own “snapshots as souvenirs of everyday life” at a specific point in my life reveals a beauty that would have been lost otherwise (Sontag 6). This could all be self-aggrandizing conjecture, but in many ways this seems to be the most true effect Sontag’s book had on my project.

### **Photo Assignments**

Concurrent with my reading in theory I worked on actually creating photographs. To give myself parameters and deadlines, I decided that I needed to set myself assignments. Many of the assignments are from *The Photographer’s Playbook*; however, there are also several that were inspired by my classwork or by



my own weird ideas. While I had not originally set myself a specific number of photography assignments to complete to allow myself room for flexibility, my schedule ended up with me doing approximately two assignments a week. These reflections on the assignments are written based on the notes I took in my journal for this project, which is included as Appendix A.

*Wandering and Wondering*

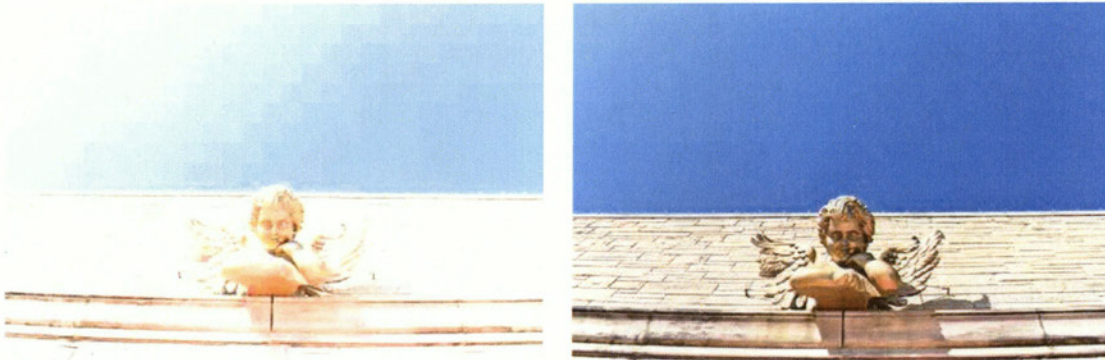


*A generically nice photograph of a bridge in Muncie.*

Back when we had a warm snap in February I decided to take my camera out and wander through Muncie, snapping photos whenever I saw something that I felt might be interesting. I drove over to Minnetrista from my apartment and basically just set off walking. This was for me a both positive and negative experience. On one hand, this did get me out in the world with my camera. It was one of the earliest assignments I set myself, and it did force me to get out and take some pictures. I got



to play with my DSLR and work my way through different settings. It let me practice adjusting my shutter speed, aperture, and ISO settings to get clear, colorful pictures. My experience at wandering and wondering was good mechanical practice for other assignments.



*The before and after of working through my camera settings.*

The issue I had with this assignment was that in many ways I felt like a tourist and not a photographer. I was trying to take interesting pictures, but I felt like all I was doing was pointing my camera at things and pressing a button. There was no consideration as to why I was taking the photos, and I felt like I was doing something any person with a camera can do. Some of the photos are interesting, but most are lifeless and boring. Something about determining that I was simply taking out my camera to shoot things that were interesting left me in a place where all I was taking felt relatively boring. I felt like I was not putting in enough work to make interesting pictures, and this influenced the final outcome. The pictures are fine, but they are not necessarily engaging. There is nothing in them to really capture the attention. Much like with my earlier goal-setting issues, I think that by leaving myself incredibly broad parameters I left myself with too much freedom and not

enough structure to create.



*The destroyed house is interesting, but the photograph does nothing of interest.*



*Hello to You Project*



*The successful portrait of the man who was finessed.*

After feeling lost in my own freedom, I decided I needed something to give me some parameters. My thesis advisor had mentioned *The Photographer's Playbook*, and I managed to pick a copy up from Amazon. I used the book to set myself assignments, and the first of the assignments I gave myself out of the book was the Hello to You project. This project basically entailed going to a high-traffic area and striking up conversations with strangers, then asking anyone who talks to you to let you make a portrait (Fulford 61). Part of the reason I gave myself this assignment was a need to push myself out of my comfort zone. I needed something to force me to do something interesting. Once I manage to force myself to engage in something uncomfortable, I usually find myself happier and more interested in what I am doing than if I am working on something I have done a thousand times before,



but the issue is in forcing myself to remember that. A comfort zone exists for a reason, and while I like the growth that comes with moving outside of it, I do also really like being comfortable.

One chilly afternoon at about one o'clock I took myself out to the Scramble light and set up camp. I started walking up to people and striking up conversations, then making portraits. We mostly talked about the weather because this was the first truly cold day after February's warm spell. Shockingly, not a single person I asked for a photo turned me down, and I took a lot of terrible photos. Many of them are awkward, and I think this may have been caused to some extent by the awkwardness of the situation. Being asked by a stranger for a photo tends to be uncomfortable, and as someone with limited practice in asking strangers for photos I probably made it worse.



*Not having enough time to really chat makes for some awkward photos.*

One of the last people I photographed, however, was a man who explained to me what it means to be finessed. We were talking about the weather and he told me his weather app finessed him. I had never heard this expression before, so he had to explain that what he meant was that his weather app had scammed him by showing a much warmer temperature for the day. We were both laughing about getting

played by our weather apps and my lack of slang knowledge, and his portrait came out well. There is something more interesting in his photo than in the others I took. A genuine interaction helped create a genuine portrait, and the Hello to You project was a success.

### *Out of Your Head*



*A beautiful mailbox captured with the sunny 16 rule.*

My next assignment to myself was an exercise in chance. On page 283 of *The Photographer's Playbook* there is an assignment that asks the photographer to roll dice to determine a direction and distance they will travel. Once that distance is travelled, the photographer must stop and take a photo. The assignment became an exercise in finding the beauty in any place instead of trying to find beautiful places. My first set of rolls brought me to an indiscriminate mailbox in my neighborhood on a bright, sunny day. I wanted to capture the vibrant colors of the sky, the houses,



and the box itself, but I was having trouble keeping the photo from washing out in the bright light. I did a frustrated Google search of how to take colorful photos on sunny days and discovered the “Sunny 16” rule on the SLR Lounge website. This rule basically says that if a camera’s aperture is set to f/16, the shutter speed will be set at the inverse of the ISO. So if, for example, the ISO is set at 100, the shutter speed should be set at 1/100. Playing around with this rule let me capture the colors I wanted in the picture. I would not say that the photos I took of the mailbox were incredible, but resultant learning was important.



*The next location determined by the dice.*

I rolled the dice again in the hope that I would get taken out of my neighborhood, and luck was on my side. I ended up taking my car out behind my neighborhood, up some back roads, and eventually ended up at Geist Reservoir. Wandering around the area in which I had parked produced lots of shots of the

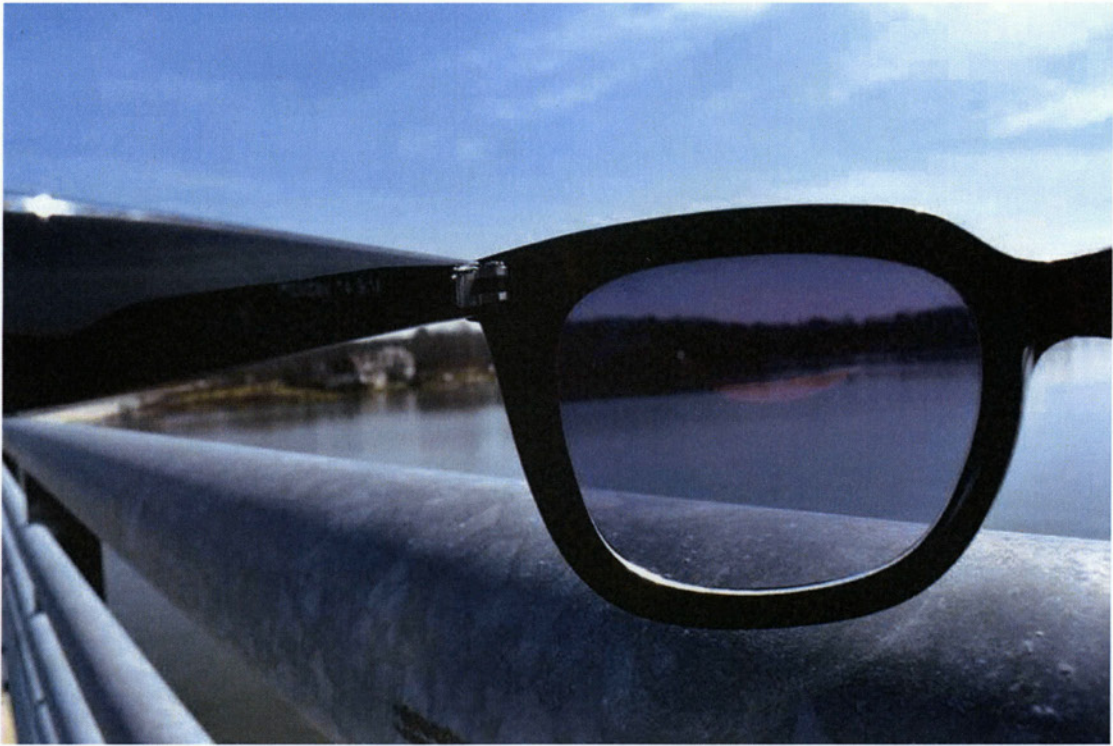


water and the Indianapolis Yacht Club building, and nothing very interesting. It was frustrating because I had to take my sunglasses off to take every picture, but this frustration also gave me an idea.

I tried to use my sunglasses as a filter over my camera lens, and they became both a filter and a frame. It let me define areas even smaller than those that my lens could



define, and those shots were almost interesting. I found that even though the assignment may not have necessarily produced anything interesting in terms of final photographic creation, it did let me learn some new things. At the end of the assignment I had a better idea of how to shoot in the sun and a new idea about disrupting my camera's functions with objects. Giving myself random boundaries sparked new ideas for future projects.



*Photo frame.*



*Candid*



*Do I like this because they're my friends or is there something truly interesting here? Does it matter either way?*

One Sunday evening some friends and I decided to go get some food from Brother's. This was a spur-of-the-moment decision, and in the spirit of spontaneity I decided to bring my camera along for the evening. Everyone I was with agreed to let me take candid photos of them throughout the evening, and so over the course of a few hours I took lots of photos. The photos are strange from the neon lights of the half-bar/half-restaurant, but the people in them are natural. They are caught in genuine moments of fun or laughter or discussion. The spontaneity of the moments creates interest in the photos that is not always there in more structured portraiture. For me, this exercise also invokes some of what Barthes described in viewing the Winter Garden photograph. I love these images. I think that they are



beautiful in a way, and if I attempted to recreate the exact photos now I think it would be impossible. Yet, these photos are in part so beautiful to me because they are of my friends. Part of their magic is that they captured the feelings of that spontaneous adventure, and they remind me of those feelings. I would imagine that to other viewers they are just regular pictures of college kids in a bar and grill. Maybe that would cause a reaction in other viewers, and maybe it would not. The candid aspect of these portraits creates interest for me, and for that I considered this spontaneous decision that was not necessarily an assignment a success.

#### *Recreating a Photo*



*Proving right every person that has every told me how much I'm like my mom.*

Inspired by some half-baked reading of Barthes and a myriad of half-read assignments from *The Photographer's Playbook* I set out to recreate a picture of my mother from memory. The photo I wanted to recreate was an image I saw a very

long time ago. The way I remember the photo it features my mom at about the age I am now sitting on a couch dressed comfortably laughing at something someone was saying off camera. I wanted to capture the feeling of the photo in a portrait of myself, so I set up shop in my living room with my camera on a timer and got to work. I took so many pictures of myself, and it was weird. I felt weird. I was trying to recreate this photo from a gathering, but I was doing it alone in my apartment. I had to laugh at myself, and the camera caught me. I was looking back through the photos and that was it. I looked at a picture of myself laughing at the ridiculousness of the situation and I saw my mother.

### *Kitchen Table*



*Can a table be more than a table?*

In order to graduate with a degree in English it is necessary to pass an English capstone course. In an effort to make my final semester of college as difficult as possible, I signed up for both my Honors thesis and my capstone course in the same semester. The English course I am taking deals with theories of everyday life, and one of those theories deals with the place of objects in the everyday. We were asked in an assignment in that course to consider an object that had significance to



us. I wrote about my cousin's kitchen table, the kitchen table that now resides in my apartment. When I first started college, my cousin lived off campus in an apartment. She owned an old, yellow Formica kitchen table, and I always fixated on this table. For me, it represented what I wanted become: the adulthood of having to own a kitchen table, the effortless vintage coolness of the Formica. The table was more than just a table; it was representative of a grown up life I aspired to have.



*Can an object also be an idea? Can it be a vessel for a projected state of being?*

My cousin and I are roommates now, and the kitchen table lives in the dining area of our ground floor apartment. Inspired by the writing I had done for my other class I decided to take photos of the table. I wanted the pictures to convey the feelings I had about the table when I saw it in my cousin's old apartment. The success of this transmission of feeling is hard for me to gauge because for me these feelings are always present in the table. Photographing things is tricky because for us they are more than just things, but that subjective belief that something is more than just a thing is hard to capture. I think the photos of the table are interesting, but I'm also approaching them with a personal history of thinking the table is interesting. Unfortunately, things cannot take on new expressions or postures to convey interest unlike living people, and so there was no apparent way to make the

table interesting to other viewers. The interest for me in the table is personal, and so it is hard to know how successful the transmission of interest is.

*Flash Color*



*Objects shape your life; why shouldn't they shape our photos?*

My fixation on objects like my table got me interested in trying to create a self-portrait through objects, which failed miserably. The issues of trying to make objects expressive that I mentioned in my discussion of the kitchen table photos made representing myself through objects nearly impossible. It did, however, lead me to a new and interesting path. I was trying to take interesting photos of the things I do everyday, so I turned all the lights off in my room and started trying to photograph my lamp. I set the shutter speed really, really slowly to capture as much light as possible, but the images came out grainy. I sped the shutter back up and turned on the flash, but then the images were too washed out. I grabbed the random



pajama shirt off of my bed and covered the flash with it to diffuse the light, and it fixed the flash issue. In a weird moment of inspiration brought on by my fixation on how objects affect our lives and on this flash-diffusing experiment, I got interested in using other objects to block my flash.

I tried with some random objects off my desk, and I discovered that covering



*Making the everyday weird with other elements of the everyday.*

the flash with colored objects would color the images. I decided that I was going to use meaningful objects to cover my flash and color images. I took a pill bottle from my migraine medication and a piece of confetti that fell out of my shoe after I went to one of my favorite band's shows, went out into the living room, and started making self-portraits. The coloring in the photos is freaky; the pill bottle gave everything a hazard orange cast and the confetti turned everything a dangerous red, but the end result produced portraits that are shaped by my things. It is an idea I have been stuck on recently; the way our stuff shapes us as much as we shape our stuff, and these images demonstrate that. Also, they look really cool.



## *Death*



*How do you show absence in a photograph?*

Keeping with the death theme from Barthes there is an assignment on page 103 of *The Photographer's Playbook* asking the photographer to create an image of what death looks like in life. In my head, death in life looks like absence. It is the space that is no longer filled by the person who has died. Death looks like all the gaps that that person once filled. I tried to capture this feeling on film, and I could not. The feeling is too deep to be simulated. I tried capturing photos of the boxes in

abandoned in my living room and of my bedroom with all my things but without me.

Nothing quite captured the feeling. Everything felt too fake and staged.

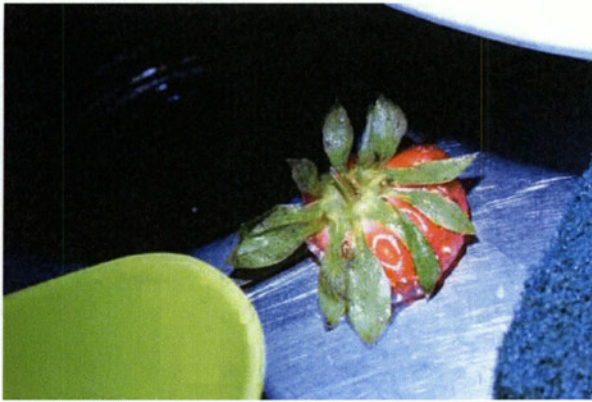
*Giving the Mundane Its Beautiful Due*



*My kitchen, but not quite.*

Inspired by the prompt on page 154 of *The Photographer's Playbook* regarding finding the beautiful in the ordinary I decided to take pictures in my kitchen. My kitchen is not pristine; the sink is full of dishes and the stove is never wiped down well enough. My kitchen betrays signs of life, and it is not beautiful in the bright way of home décor magazines no matter how much I want it to be. This assignment became an exercise in coaxing the beauty from the everyday. I tried everything. I took macro shots of strawberry tops in the sink. I photographed the sink at a distance. I photographed the garbage disposal. Nothing worked.





Instead of trying to find the beautiful, I decided to find the weird. I turned off all the lights and started shooting things under the glare of an LED flashlight. My kitchen became all at once something both familiar and not, something normal and creepy. This is when the photos got interesting to look at. The LED brought blues and blacks into the background and foregrounded the red accessories in my kitchen. Things washed out spookily. The photos showed something in between the ordinary and the extraordinary, and they became interesting.



## *Natural Portraits*



*Catching a Lily that looks like Lily.*

The last two assignments I completed before beginning work on the writing of this thesis both involve photographs of others. On page 4 of *The Photographer's Playbook* there is an assignment that deals with getting natural expressions out of the subjects posing for portraits. The assignment instructs you to instruct your subject to find their reflection in the lens of the camera. The distraction gives their face a more natural expression. I had tried this on myself, but knowing the trick of the instruction meant that my facial expression still looked posed in photos. I enlisted two of my friends to become subjects. The first of my friends I tried the reflection trick on, and it worked. Before I gave her the direction to look for herself she was posing for the camera. Her expression is too pleasant and looks forced. She looks like herself when she is looking for herself.



*Meghan looking like the Meghan I know.*

Inspired by the distracting trick of the lens reflection I set out to make portraits of another one of my friends. For these portraits, however, instead of giving her instructions I simply had her sit on a bench and talk to me. I made portraits of her while we had a conversation about the stress from our classes, when we were going to go get dinner, what our plans were for the weekend. We ran through all kinds of topics. When I went back through the pictures, some were awkward because she was talking, and I caught her at a weird moment. Some, however, were really good. They showed her naturally. Distracting the subjects of my portraits gave me a way to catch them as they really are and not as a projection of who they think they should be, and the pictures were more interesting as a result.

## **Conclusion**



At the outset of this project I told myself that I was going to teach myself photography. In many ways this is what I did. I learned more about how to learn, I read photo theory, and I made photos. Assessing my accomplishments at the end of this project I feel proud of the advances I made. I did learn a great deal that I did not know when I started out. I expanded my understanding of what photography is and what it means and what it can be. I made pictures that I never would have thought I could create. I pushed myself in new directions, and I learned so much. Did I teach myself photography? Absolutely not.

The issue with this plan as originally stated begins and ends with the fact that photography is an art. Art in many ways implies growth. If you are not pushing yourself to create new things, you are not creating art. A painter does not know painting because they made one great painting; they know how to make one great painting. The same can be said of photography. If I want to approach photography as an art (and after the theory reading I have done I contend that this is the only way to approach it) then I have to be prepared to never be finished. There will always be something new for me to discover.

This does not mean that I did not succeed in the goals I outlined for myself. I did the reading on self-regulated learning and photography, and I worked on taking photos, and I created photographs. I narrowed my scope and this allowed me to succeed. The most important learning experience of this thesis for me goes beyond the scope of my thesis. I want to become a good photographer. I am currently not a bad photographer, per se, but there is always room for improvement. I have more to learn, and so this learning experience must continue beyond this thesis project.



There is so much more reading to do in theory. There are so many more photos to create. There always will be.

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## **Appendix A**

- pg. 1 - redefine learning as learner-active not learner-passive  
"personal initiative, perseverance & adaptive skill"
- pg. 5 - self-oriented Feedback loop - monitor learning, assess what's working, make changes based on assessment
- pg. 13 - "personal meaningfulness & relevance of learning activities relative to one's competencies and goals"  
perceptions
- pg. 18/19 - use of computers to self-regulate learning - Pomodoro timer
- pg. 21 - three-phase cyclical model (forethought, performance, self-reflection)
- pg. 24 - three state orientations interfere with action control
  1. rumination - on prior failure
  2. extrinsic focus - preoccupation of future not immediate outcomes
  3. vacillating - insecurity ~~about~~ deciding course of action
    - ↳ can prevent with cognitive monitoring
- pg. 44 - self-reports allow direct recording of work
- pg. 52 - self-administered verbal & tangible rewards ~~are~~ are considered equivalent to external contingencies
- pg. 53 - ~~work~~ then play reinforcement
- pg. 75 - self-structures (individuals thoughts/beliefs/feelings about selves) & self-regulation are tied → SR first step becomes goal setting
- pg. 82 - "learning is a natural process ~~that~~ directed primarily at creating the self"
- pg. 93 - "reactions to self-evaluations that yield discrepancies between who we are and want to be are primary determinants of motivation"
- pg. 96 - "willpower or 'just do it' strategies were found to be less effective than volitional strategies in maintaining intentions to persist and complete a task"
- pg. 100 - "goals aimed self-development rather than approval of others contribute to positive and adaptive motivational patterns that can underlie self-regulated learning"



pg. 101 - "Feelings of personal causality are believed to be a more important determinant of continued intrinsic motivation than perceptions of competence"

pg. 108 - goal setting requires understanding of what is important to goal setter

\* must have realistic expectations of what can be accomplished

pg. 109 - goals should guide learning plan

goal achievement should be regularly assessed

pg. 110 - when learning is enjoyable, learners want to learn and take self-regulatory steps naturally

pg. 131 - regular observation required for effectiveness of self-observation

pg. 132 - goals have three properties:

- specificity - allows for easy gauging of progress & hence motivation

- proximity - goals easy to where you are <sup>allow</sup> ~~are~~ easy gauging of progress

- difficulty - find balance of ease & challenge to motivate

pg. 135 - memories stored in long-term memory retrievable by network

pg. 137 - learning requires guiding learners to create useful links in the memory

pg. 138 - Schema: collection of characterizing features; provide frameworks for recognizing new instances of information; tools for making inferences

pg. 139 - tactic: a rule expressed in IF/THEN form

- potential multiple if's allow for specialized or differentiated reactions (conditional knowledge)

pg. 140 - strategy: a design or plan for approaching a high-level goal

- plan for steps before they act (IF-THEN-ELSE)



- strategies increase attention because the "ELSE" requires monitoring outcomes of "THEN"
- IF-THEN-ELSE creates feedback, feedback updates task's conditions
- allows for construction of conditional knowledge → more discriminating conditional knowledge allows better regulation of approach to learning

pg. 175 - goals phrased in terms of time do not provide subject-matter relevant standards for monitoring

pg. 228 - "self-control enables socially meaningful activity"

- pg. 254 -
- intrinsic motivation to seek information
  - understanding goes beyond given information
  - mental representations change w/ development
  - progressive refinements in levels of understanding
  - developmental constraints on learning
  - reflection & reconstruction stimulate learning

pg. 255 - desirability of certain strategies, behaviors, affects are regulated by culture

pg. 257 - "people construct personalized interpretations of their own lives & actions that reflect coherence and optimism"

pg. 258 - students use available info about self & history to construct possible future selves

- choice of action can be regulated by perceptions of others → make choices to appear certain way

pg. 259 - "We should not overlook the motivation for students to be self-regulated as highly personalized desires to be regarded by their peers as a certain type of person."

pg. 260 - "striving to become a person with specific abilities and identities that organizes a person's knowledge, beliefs, & actions"



pg. 267 - self-efficacy: perceptions of one's ability to behave in a certain way

- ~~high~~ judgment of self-efficacy: participation in academic tasks, challenge, work harder, persist through failure, & achieve at a higher level

- Factors that promote positive beliefs about personal agency: Success, positive feedback, observational learning, social persuasion

pg. 269-270 - mastery goals (goals based on task mastery) are more effective; linked to positive, adaptive patterns of attributions; cause students to spend more time on tasks, be more persistent, & have higher levels of cognitive engagement

pg. 279 - SRL actions develop from theories about the self & identity

### Intrinsic & Extrinsic Motivation

pg. 258 - 4 "C"s of intrinsic motivation: Challenge, curiosity, control, context.

pg. 260-261 - extrinsic motivation can lower interest in task participation

pg. 262 - noncontingent extrinsic awards are more likely to produce ~~beneficial~~ <sup>beneficial</sup> effects

- unexpected <sup>extrinsic</sup> rewards are more likely to produce positive effects on intrinsic motivation

- intangible rewards are more likely to produce beneficial effects (implicit, social, or verbal awards)

pg. 265 - receipt of external rewards can lead individuals to feel like pawns

pg. 273 - possible for extrinsic & intrinsic motivation to work together to produce positive outcome

pg. 282/283 - lack of grounding in real world applicability can lead to decreased motivation; intrinsic interest inspired by real world curiosity

pg. 295 - overfocus on extrinsic motivation students suffer <sup>lack of motivation</sup> where external rewards available; overfocus on ~~extrinsic~~ intrinsic demotivates students



personal motivation to accomplish tasks decreases when I place time constraints on task ~~and more is accomplished~~

in areas of limited personal interest

pg. 342 - interest in a task may depend on elements not directly related to the task (i.e. a student who maintains interest in Donne by discussing Donne w/ a friend)

pg. 344/345 - differences in goal setting and belief in importance of goal can affect motivation to achieve

pg. 346 - degree of interest can influence maintenance actions (i.e. actions designed to increase interest) → increase motivation to accomplish a task

pg. 350 - females more likely to have interpersonal focus in achievement goals

pg. 373 - situational interest: particular subjects or content or events trigger interest but may not produce long term knowledge  
individual interest: ongoing and deepening relation of a person to particular content; increasingly consolidated base of knowledge

pg. 375 - individual interest is a constantly evolving relation of a person and subject that exists as a psychological state of interestedness and as a process through which a person becomes identified with a subject and vice versa

pg. 376 - stored-knowledge component: individual must have enough knowledge of the subject to raise "curiosity questions"

pg. 378 - individual interest is not always obvious to the interested individual  
- ~~however~~ exists "as an individual's knowledge of and value for particular subject content and the process of further consolidation"

pg. 380 - individual interest doesn't form in a vacuum; is based on thinking like a poet/photographer/scientist/whatever

pg. 386 - questions of how or why something works make for individual interest (how do you take a compelling photograph?)



4 steps                      decides to  
pg. 392 - to organize info, learn it, & have personal questions about it:

1. know enough to organize
2. seek resources to figure out what isn't known
3. enjoy understanding & developing competence
4. be clear about what they still want to understand

pg. 57 - task-contingent rewards decrease motivation almost always;  
performance-contingent rewards are more complex

personal issue with Pomodoro timer → rewards

pg. 58 - to reach creative potential, individuals must work without reaching for  
extrinsic goal

is my entire project undermined by the expectation of a good grade?

pg. 62 - without initial intrinsic interest there can be no decrease → issue of many  
rewards studies

pg. 65 - in situations where an external & internal motivation are present, people  
tend to credit the external motivator & discount the internal

creative tasks like a maze with many exits and many ways to reach  
them; in presence of expected reward, the goal becomes leave the  
maze as fast as possible

pg. 67 - potentially, use of reward frames task as work instead of play,  
and work is associated with not fun or even aversive tasks

pg. 71 - motivational synergy: a condition under which intrinsic & extrinsic  
motivation operate together for positive influence; requires informational  
or enabling extrinsic motivation instead of controlling

pg. 231 - mastery goals: develop competence in an activity

performance goals: demonstrate competence ~~relative~~ relative to others

pg. 232 - performance goals can be divided into categories and certain types  
of PGs can promote adaptive learning

pg. 233-234 - purpose goals: why an individual engages in a task and  
what they hope to accomplish in a particular situation  
target goals: specific goals to achieve the overarching purpose goal

pg. 236- individuals with high achievement motivation may find that mastery goals do nothing to increase motivation but a performance goal gives them the challenge to demonstrate competence and outperform



## The Pomodoro Timer

In an attempt to regulate my own learning, I decided to test the use of a Pomodoro timer. Initially I felt that the timer was helping me accomplish tasks, but as I went on I found myself focusing more on getting to a break than on focusing on reading/working. In further SRL reading, I discovered a connection between extrinsic rewards and lowered motivation. As I felt the breaks were a reward for work, my interest in doing the work became tied to reward-achievement instead of self-satisfaction. This ~~was~~ convinced me to give up the Pomodoro timer and instead focus on work, taking breaks when I needed them.

## On Setting Goals

I've realized my initial goal of "learn photography" probably isn't specific enough for continued intrinsic motivation. I need to find a way to narrow the goal into something more manageable, though currently I'm not sure how to do that. I'm leaning towards saying that my goal is to take 5 pictures that I think are good, but currently that seems like the wrong kind of specificity. I don't think specificity of number is going to help me, I need specificity of purpose. What is good? The criteria is too vague.

## Wandering and Wandering

I set out to walk through downtown Muncie today. The landscape was fascinating and deserted. I keep finding myself simply pointing my camera at things I like and shooting. I don't enjoy this. It makes me feel like a tourist. I feel like I'm missing something essential. Any idiot can point a camera at something and click. I want to make something interesting. I think the



interest has to come from being good. I feel like an imposter calling myself a photographer and only taking photos I think are bad. It doesn't seem like enough effort to simply take my camera and point at things. I feel like I've been taught by my environment that that is what photography is supposed to be, and I need to break out of that head space.

### Abandoned Places

I'm drawn to abandoned and decayed places. It reminds me of the alienation I want from stories; I want to feel distance between the events and myself. It reminds me of the way I like to envision my future home; white walls, blacks greys in the furniture, minimal decor.

Alienation. Maybe it's a facet of myself, a feeling of being alienated reflected in my interest in abandonment and starkness.

Maybe it's a morbid fascination with what's left behind (although probably not. I'm more interested in modern ruins than in ancient ones.) Maybe it's like Tim said, an

interest in the danger and arrestability of the act. I've fantasized about breaking into every abandoned building I've ever seen. Maybe the fascination with these images stems from a desire to be as daring as the photographers who make them. Something about the ghosts of the people in abandoned places fascinates me. Maybe I'm drawn to abandonment because I love ghost stories.

Desolation. What's left behind. Hauntings. Foundations.

I'm hung up on how things exist outside of humanity.

Things become objects when people give them meaning, and objects become things when that meaning is lost yet that means that all things must exist because of their relationship to humanity. I need to write more about this.



## The Greatness Assignment

1. one perfect sunrise in Venice
2. relief at a healing
3. waiting in line for a show
4. Christmas Eve
5. Overalls
6. clean black & white design.
7. hand binding books
8. Pally's at midnight with mom
9. existential despair
10. ghost tours
11. sunny snowy days
12. a really long walk
13. Times Square, midnight, Jan. 1
14. a new book in your hands
15. Falling in love
16. Finally falling out of love
17. proper thunderstorms
18. really good coffee
19. a McDonald's Diet Coke when you really need it
20. Hacienda Chips and Salsa
21. airports
22. dinner with a friend
23. burning a good scented candle
24. Grandma's house on an off Sunday
25. a thorough cleaning
- \* in the order they were thought of.
26. grocery shopping in empty stores
27. brand new Keds
28. someone calling me punk rock
29. new friends when you need them
30. dreaming is free
31. open windows
32. giving away unnecessary possessions
33. leaving home
34. coming home
35. laptop stickers
36. vinyl
37. inside jokes
38. ambiversion
39. The Trevi Fountain
40. the abandoned barn on Cynthianne
41. new pens
42. souvenir coffee mugs
43. visits to Ikea
44. concert t-shirts
45. walkable cities
46. crawling into bed when exhausted
47. train rides
48. the gift of free time
49. cooking something new that ~~actually~~ ends up being really good
- 50.

## Reflecting

My list of greatness has themes: family, love, leaving, food, home. It's interesting to build a list that seems so broken up but really fits into a few categories. Things become great not because of themselves but because of what they mean. Their inundations.



## Why Writing and Fear of Writing

Why do I want to write? Currently it's just because my gut feeling is that it's what I should be doing. I know storytelling is important. Am I trying to tell a story? Is my motivation for writing inherently selfish? I want to write about myself to work through myself. Work through myself. Can you write your way through a forest of self doubt? Can the words become the machete that lets you cut your way out? How do I move beyond feeling trapped by my own inadequacies? Why do I fear reading as pretensions? How do I write what I want to read? How do I find a way to write myself out of self doubt? Why am I afraid to fail? Why can't I show my writing to others? Why do I find creative writing majors frustrating and pretentious? Is my dislike of them wrapped up in my own thoughts about myself? How do I know what to write.

## Guardian

Anytown, USA is a dangerous place ~~to live~~. On either side of its tracks you can see the world sinking into nothing. Anytown, USA is a collapsed star, sucking in ~~all~~ the light ~~you can see~~. The people of Anytown are not the ones in danger, it's the passerby who finds his life at risk. The outsider is lured by comfortability, the stability of a life in Anytown, USA. Buy your home cheap in Anytown, and bury your dreams in the front garden. Use them to fertilize the flowers that grow under the spray from the hose in your hand. ~~as above~~



## Camera Lucida

- photography as relational to death: capture of that which is gone
- what if you could eat photos?
- What if a photo could function as a colon? a semicolon? what would that look like?
- Sound photographs? "reproducing to infinity" what happened once
  - photograph what a sound is like
  - photograph something that tastes like something
- how do you prevent posing in portraiture?
- is a portrait truly representative of a person? can you portray a consciousness in a photograph?
- photography as "profound madness" pg. 13
- pg. 13 - authenticity of photography, how to get around it?
- how is photography affected by position / place / time?
- pg. 18 - is it possible to develop a photographic style? how does one allow style to come through in a precise medium?
- pg. 19 - how to capture adventure in a photograph?
- pg. 21 - photography is a wound
- pg. 26 - studium (the regularity of the photograph induced by a kind of photographic schema, made interesting by the punctum; the thing that is different, stand out, wounding)
- pg. 30 - photography to mark a certain point in history
- pg. 38 - photographs of landscape must be habitable
- pg. 47 - how much of photography is simply having a good eye and the right moment?
- pg. 51 - "the incapacity to name is a good symptom of disturbance"
- try to recreate a photo from memory
- pg. 73 - inability to reproduce the Winter Garden photograph because his visceral attachment is subjective
- pg. 76 - photography is unique in that it is reference; something must have existed to be photographed
- pg. 79 - photography began as an art of the person



- pg. 86 - "lost subsequently, like everything too carefully put away"
- pg. 82 - black & white photos record light → visceral
- pg. 87 - the photograph is laborious only when it takes"
- pg. 92 - I'm an agent of death. How pink rock.
- pg. 96 - every photograph is the catastrophe of death

• recreate photo & man



## Photographic Assignments

- Photograph 5 Strangers → hello to you
- Photograph friends in their homes
- distribute pictures of Muncie to Muncie
- photograph of myself, compromised
- dice photo game
- photograph a secret
- fashion shoot on Jackson
- carry camera everywhere for a week
- photographs at hibachi
- get mom to describe a nightmare and photograph
- photograph a mood
- make portraits of Zach

## Hello project pg. 61

I went to the Scramble light and began trying to strike up conversations with strangers. When people spoke with me, I asked them if I could take their picture. No one I asked said no. I had intended to ~~to~~ spend more time at the scramble light, but it was frigid so I was only there for 30 minutes. I had a great deal of fun making these photos though. I like talking to people, and this project got me out of my comfort zone and taking portraits. I have found that once I initiate the "being out of my comfort zone" I tend to enjoy it. The idea of doing something uncomfortable is worse than the act ~~of~~ <sup>itself</sup>. I like taking risks. I ~~also~~ found that I tended to approach those who seemed to least conform to cultural norms. I wonder if this was a personal bias towards people who choose to stand out or if this was simply because I was approaching people alone in smaller groups and these people tended to fit my criteria. I'm hoping I have time to tackle this again, but it's hard to do when it's freezing out because 1. people tend not to stop and 2. I don't want to be outside longer than necessary.



### Random direction

On the suggestion of an assignment in the photographer's Playbook I used rolls of the dice to determine where I would go to take a photo. The idea of the assignment was to force a photographer to consider the photographic aesthetic of a specified place instead of choosing a place that would be naturally inclined to be photographed. For me, this assignment also gave me a way to head somewhere new at random. I did the rolls while at home over spring break, and the first one brought me to a random street in my neighborhood. I wanted to capture an interesting image of the mailbox but was having trouble catching color in the photo because the sky was clear & sunny and washing out my pictures. It led me to the sunny 16 rule. The mailbox photo isn't that interesting, but the assignment did succeed at something new. The next roll took me out to Geist Reservoir. I tried to take some photos of the water & the I/C building. Nothing was very interesting until I tried to frame my image through my sunglasses. I was trying to use the lens as a filter but ended up using the frames as literal frames. It's got me interested in using objects to surround other objects. The assignment produced better ideas than it did pictures.

### Candid

My friends and I decided to go to ~~Brothers~~ Brothers on a Sunday. I brought my camera along because I'm trying to take it everywhere. I ended up taking ~~many~~ candid photos of everyone, including my ex-girlfriend (both of whom are my friends). Putting a camera in the middle of my discomfort was an interesting exercise. It both



Cyano type-93

made me look at and consider the source of my discomfort while also putting something between me and the discomfort. I think it's interesting. I also think the pictures register the element of my discomfort without overwhelming the photos I'm going to keep taking candidly.

### Recreating a Picture

I used an assignment from ~~IPP~~ ~~the~~ a combined it with Barth's idea about seeing your family in the face in a photograph. I tried to recreate a picture I saw of my mom a long time ago when I was really young. I took a bunch of shots, but I know I had done it when I looked at one and saw my mom. It was startling to see myself that way even though I know my mom and I are very similar. It was weird staging the photo, though, because from what I remember it's a photo from an event. No one else is in the photo, but you can feel there's people just off screen. That was hard to capture in my empty apartment. I still felt like the assignment went well.

### Kitchen Table

see ENG444 assignment

I was inspired to photograph my kitchen table in a certain "mood" by an assignment for ENG444. Trying to convey the feeling of the table was hard, but it also wasn't hard. It felt like exploring who I was about 2 years ago, but also me now. I got to interact with the table in a different yet familiar way. I had always thought of it per the ENG444 assignment, but I had never tried to convey that feeling to others. (Also, this has me



ready to find inspo everywhere.)

### Object Self Portraits

I was flipping through the objects assignments and the self-portrait assignments in TPR, and I decided I wanted to take a self-portrait in objects. It started with pictures of my bed because I've been feeling depressed recently and very much drawn to my bed. Then I ended up laying in my bed because it was there, and it was where I wanted to be. It seemed more realistic of a self portrait to be taken from in the bed. The lights in my room were dimmed, so I started playing with my flash. The flash washed everything out, so I started covering it. I used a white pajama shirt and the pictures came out stark. I used a pill bottle and everything was bathed in a sick orange light. I used confetti that fell out of my shoe when I got home from a concert. Everything turned sad party pink. I used a green cup full of water and almost got abducted by aliens. I wanted to do a series of blocked flash self-portraits but I have to figure out how to suspend things in front of the flash first. I think the color vibes could be cool.



## On Photography

- pg. 3 - photography instructs humanity
- pg. 3 - "an ethics of seeing"
- pg. 6 - snapshots as souvenirs of daily life
- pg. 9 - "photographs give people an imaginary possession of a past that is not real"
- pg. 9 - "travel becomes a strategy for accumulating photographs"
- pg. 10 - photography during travel as a kind of work → alienation of leisure
- pg. 11 - "equalized by the camera"
- pg. 12 - "The person who intervenes cannot record; The person who records cannot intervene"
- pg. 14 - camera-as-dick sexual metaphors are shot
- pg. 14 - The camera is sold as a predatory weapon"
- pg. 15 - "photography is an elegiac art"
- pg. 16 - "A photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence."
- pg. 19 - ideology creates event, photos follow
- pg. 21 - "Time eventually positions most photographs, even the most amateurish, at the level of art."
- pg. 28 - idealized images in photography
- pg. 28 - "to photographs to confer importance"
- pg. 47 - Diane Arbus creating connections among the "idiot village" that is America
- pg. 53 - photography as surreal art → "quasi-magical, quasi-accidental" cooperation between photographer and subject; "real" work of creation done by camera
- pg. 57 - "essentially the camera makes everyone a tourist in other people's reality, and eventually in one's own"
- pg. 58 - "what is surreal is the distance imposed, and bridged, by the photograph"
- pg. 64 - "photographing something becomes <sup>artistic</sup> part of the procedure for altering it"



- pg. 65- "In America every Specimen becomes a relic"
- pg. 70- "Photography is the inventory of mortality"
- pg. 77- destruction renders both photographs & architecture more appealing & compelling → photos of abandoned places
- pg. 82- "suggest the vanity of even trying to understand the world and instead propose we collect it"
- pg. 89- "The heroism of vision" - Photos allowing each person to display a certain unique, vivid sensibility"
- pg. 93- subject of photograph is of prime importance"
- pg. 93- "fostering the idea of seeing for seeing's sake"
- pg. 103- "beauty has been revealed by photographs as existing everywhere"
- pg. 107- Benjamin's belief that writers should be photographers
- pg. 123- "assault on reality and submission to reality"
- pg. 147- "an experience of art that is mediated, second-hand, intense in a different way"
- pg. 167- "the camera makes... ~~the~~ familiar things small, abstract, strange, much farther away"
- pg. 173- "beauty is not inherent in anything; it is to be found by another way of seeing"
- pg. 179- "images consume reality"



## What It IS

- pg. 6. "It's like there's a place inside me where it's all still alive"
- pg. 28. "misery and joy seemed to perish in its light"
- pg. 39. "A Fairytale, a kind of story with hopelessness in it"
- pg. 48. "Follow a wandering"
- pg. 53. "a girl made of snow facing a flickering light"
- pg. 66. "What was my monster?"
- pg. 76. "Find something good inside me that experts could detect"
- pg. 81. "When a certain person in a certain place in a certain time  
arranges certain uncertainties into certain form"
- pg. 93. "You will go to it and willingly turn to stone. What else  
can you do?"
- pg. 140. "A Feeling of life being something worth living?"
- pg. 143 Cars

1. Nova

2. Zephyr

3. Windsor

4. White pickup

5. Big red van

6. Fawcett

7. Kia

8. Trail Blazer with cow hitch

9. Tracker

10. School bus



### Giving the Mundane Its Beautiful Due pg. 154

I was inspired by this prompt to make pictures in my kitchen. I felt like generally ~~the~~ a sink full of dirty dishes doesn't usually have much in it in the way of beauty, so I was trying to find a way to make beauty in the ordinary. There's an argument to be made here that there is beauty in everything, you just have to uncover it. For me the beauty was found in the mess in the dark with an LED flashlight. It gave just enough of a spooky cast to the ordinary objects in the sink to make them interesting. I turned to the red metals in my kitchen (an espresso maker & a kettle) and cast them in a blue light. The unsettling blues and blacks of the background pulled out the red. My mundane and ordinary kitchen became more than just a kitchen; a place between. The photographs became a liminal space between my daily activities of cooking, surviving and an art world where the usual becomes unusual.

### Death pg. 103

I wanted to capture an idea of what death looks like in life, but I struggled to find away to express it. I feel like death is an absence in life. For someone who is still alive, death necessarily becomes a hole. It's where something ~~is~~ ~~is~~ missing from the picture. I tried with various objects in my apartment to show this absence, but nothing felt missing enough. Shooting an empty bed, a pile of boxes, a pot with no plant felt off, but it didn't feel like death. I might revisit this later when I have some subjects for portraits. Maybe a table laid for 3 ~~or~~ set at by two would better catch the idea. Death is absence.

### Find your Reflection pg. 4

For the assignment of finding a reflection in the lens of a camera I started taking self-portraits and trying to find myself in the lens. The goal was to get a natural expression on my face.



I was finding that my expression in the photos was still too unnatural. I was too focused on the artificiality of the reflection finding and kept acting myself pulling faces of "concentration" or whatever. The pictures were still coming out artificially, so I changed the assignment and looked for my reflection in other parts of the camera. I was looking into the little light that helps the camera focus. It hadn't been going off for these photos, but for some reason this time it did and the light blinded me. That photo was the most natural & the best. Something about the sparkle distracted me and kept me from thinking about the photo. Pro tip for future portraits: Sneak the subject out so they look candid.

Slow Down pg. 16

"think more and shoot less"

making me feel slightly better about this endeavor

Flash Blocking

I went back and used all the weird ruminating on objects I've been doing to make some self-portraits. I took a pill bottle (from my migraine medicine) and a piece of confetti from a concert and used them to cover the flash and color my self-portraits. The pedagogy of things ~~is~~ is a theory I've been studying in my ENG 444 class that says that things teach us how to use them, but beyond that I think in many ways our things teach us how to be. We are as shaped by objects as objects are shaped by us. I think this is why I'm hung up on the idea of object self-portraits. I have an idea that if we could get just the right photo of an object it might say more about us than a picture of us ever could. Anyway, the coloring in the photos is freaky, but it did produce some cool stuff I would show other



people, so that was exciting. I think I'm going to try it with my friends. I might also ask them to let me create a portrait of them via an object that's important to them.

Find your Reflection pg. 4-

I photographed my friend Lily. She looked really awkward in the first few I did while I was adjusting my camera settings. Eventually I got everything set up and I used the reflection trick on her. I really liked the results! On someone who doesn't know how the trick is supposed to be distracting, the facial expressions really relax and just look normal. I felt like Lily looked more like Lily when she wasn't thinking about looking like Lily.

I decided to try something slightly different for portraits of my friend Meghan. Instead of having her look into the lens and find herself, I distracted her by talking. Before we started ~~taking~~ working on portraits we had spent about an hour just talking. I kept our conversation going while I was shooting her, and I think it distracted her from the camera a bit. Much like with Lily and the reflection, our conversation portraits make photos of Meghan look like Meghan.